Evidence-based bullying prevention interventions founded in positive behavioral solutions

Campus violence and aggression continue to be a flashpoint for the media, increasing public awareness and leading school district and government leaders to take action. Currently, the main focal point of these actions is represented in the efforts to institute initiatives and legislation to address bullying in our public schools. The focus on bullying, specifically, and aggression at school, generally, is not a recent or unfounded concern. The U.S. Department of Education reported in the School Crime and Safety Report (Nov., 2010) that more than one in three students convey that they are being bullied at school and 25% of all our public schools indicate that bullying occurs on a daily basis. The National Education Association (1995) estimated that each weekday, approximately 160,000 students skipped school due to bullying. Over the years this number has surely grown. More recent studies have indicated that the prevalence of bullying involves approximately 30% of all students (Cook, et al., 2010, Nansel et al., 2001; Soleburg & Olweus, 2003). Additionally, it is estimated that 40% to 80% of school-age children experience bullying at some point during their school careers and 10-15% may be chronic victims of bullies (Nansel et al., 2001). Bullying is now recognized as a pervasive problem in schools across the nation regardless of size, location (urban, suburban, rural), or the composition of the student enrollment. In fact, as the problem is beginning to be better understood, it has become apparent that it is international and transcends cultures.

Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010, have accomplished a rigorous review of the research on school-age bullying and conducted a meta-analysis to examine factors that predict bullying and victimization. From this large body of research, they gleaned 13 predictors of school bullying. Eight of these factors represent individual characteristics (externalizing and internalizing behaviors, social competence, self-related and other-related thoughts and perceptions, and academic performance) and five represent contextual aspects (family and home environment, school climate, community factors, peer status, and peer influence). From their comprehensive inquiry, Cook, et al (2010) compiled a description of each group. The typical *bully*: significantly exhibits aggression, defiance, and disruptive behavior; has some internalizing symptoms; has challenges in both social competence and academic; comes from a negative family environment characterized by inconsistent or neglectful parenting and verbal and/or physical conflict; has a negative perception of their school's climate; and is highly predisposed to follow and be impacted by negative influences from peers and the community. The typical *victim*: is most likely to exhibit depression, anxiety, and avoidant behavior; can demonstrate non-compliance and disruptive behavior; lacks appropriate social skills and social problem-solving capabilities; has a pessimistic view of self; comes from an unsupportive and unconstructive community, family, and school environment; and is markedly rejected and isolated by peers. The typical *bully victim*: has interrelated externalizing and internalizing problems; is significantly deficient in social problem-solving, social

competence, and social skills; has an overriding negative view of self and others; performs poorly in academics; and has pervasively unhealthy peer inactions characterized by the need to identify with the negative aspect of peers while inversely being shunned and rejected by them.

School psychologists have contributed greatly to the investigation of bullying in our schools. Their focus has traditionally been on the relationship between bully and victim, in which they have worked to identify the characteristics, effects, and negative outcomes that bullying has on individual students. While it is important to continue to examine and investigate the negative impact of bullying on the individual, bullying and aggression at school occurs in a context larger than the individual interplay between two students. Students are social beings. Most of what they do is greatly influenced by their shared surrounding, specifically by their peer group. Many of the behaviors that students engage in are guided by their beliefs of how their peers will respond to them. In order to provide sustainable and effective interventions to address bullying in our schools, we must expand the range of programs that traditionally focus on the treatment of the underlying psycho-social pathology found in the students that are chronic bullies and/or victims, to develop system-wide interventions that involve all students as well as the social context (Faris, & Felmlee, 2011) that reinforces bullying behavior. Within this social context, the role of bystanders in the reinforcement cycle can be examined and addressed. Expressly, bullying, similar to other disruptive behaviors, can best be addressed through the implementation of a multi-tiered system that provides proactive and positive expectations for all students on a campus, while continuing to improve the individualized support for the most disruptive and impacted students.

In a recent article, Farmer and colleagues (2010) report on the "two social worlds" of bullying: *marginalization* on the one hand, and *connection* on the other. Socially marginalized bullies "may be

fighting against a social system that keeps them on the periphery," whereas socially connected bullies "may use aggression to control others." Marginalized bullies fit the traditional stereotype—students that have a myriad of psycho-social problems that often express these issues. These students represent the more traditional definition of bully. Socially connected bullies are more astute and integrated with their peer group and are much less recognized. Socially connected bullies have a variety of friends and positive strengths such as social skills, athleticism, or physical attractiveness. They tend to be proactive and goal-directed in their aggression, using it to establish social status. They are more likely to employ bullying periodically based on the situation and peers involved, since they tend to have the socialization needed to be able to use other methods of interactions determined by the social circumstances. These students are rarely identified as having behavioral issues and use aggressive and bullying behaviors within the status strata of their school. Recent research is focusing on relational aggression as a form social/emotional bullying. *Education Week* (February, 2011) cited research that is "bringing into focus an alternative to the stereotypical image of the dull, socially awkward, and physically aggressive schoolyard bully: a popular, socially astute student who uses rumors and social isolation to control enemies, rivals, and friends alike." Since relational aggression generally consists of behind-the-scenes manipulation, as well as gossip and rumors, it is often difficult for parents and educators to know that it is occurring, due to the social awareness and "popularity" of this type of bully. This expansion of the conceptualization of bullying to include students beyond the scope of how we traditional address students with behavioral disorders requires that a systemic comprehensive approach be taken. Specifically, all students on a campus should be provided behavioral supports because of the impact that bystanders have on bullying and the supposition that a subset of those students who bully for social status rewards include students that are normally not regarded as having behavioral issues.

The American Psychological Association (2010), in a White Paper examining the gaps in the literature of the application of psychological science in education, found that while there is a large foundation of psychological research on bullying in our schools, there are four gaps that require further investigation. Investigations of these gaps and research in these areas have an important ramification on the development and implementation of effective anti-bullying programs at our schools.

- **Increase the focus on the research on, and evaluation of, school-level interventions.** The best way to ensure the implementation of evidence-based anti-bullying programs is through the support of their implementations scientifically, using the research and evaluation process. The identification and support of "best practices" within the research will aid school districts in the application of systems that are best suited to address their needs.

- **Greater consideration of the role of social and contextual school factors that impact bullying.** Research on the application of school-wide factors provides a comprehensive picture of the issues in schools that motivate, facilitate, and perpetuate bullying and will assist in the development of system-wide, campus-level, evidence-based interventions.

- **Expanding the application of longitudinal research.** Specifically, to examine the factors that place students at long-term risk for bullying and the long-term consequences of being involved in the bully dyad (Bully, victim, or victim/bully) (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Waldrop, 2001). Additionally, there is need to investigate the course that bullying takes over the whole range of schooling, with special attention on the transitional grades between elementary and middle and middle and high school.

- **An increased focus on the developmental perspective of bullying.** For example, physical bullying appears to be much more common in younger children, whereas the more covert and psychological tactics such as social ostracism and rumors become more normative among older children and adolescents (e.g., Archer & Coyne, 2005; Nansel et al., 2001). Until we know more about the type and course of bullying at different ages, we will remain unsure about the developmental appropriateness of particular intervention approaches.

Based on these recommendations by APA, anti-bullying programs would be well founded in addressing these concerns and supporting research in these areas. The effectiveness of a multi-modal approach that can be implemented campus wide and developmentally appropriate at each school level (Elementary, Middle, and High) should be examined. Programs should provide all students with awareness about bullying and its social- and contextual-related aspects as well as individualized supports to those students that require more intensive interventions. Programs should also be designed to be aligned within the school's more generalized discipline management and positive behavioral support systems. Bullying involves a cadre of disruptive student behaviors (e.g., aggression, social competence issues), many of which can be addressed within the Behavioral Response to Intervention (B-RTI) and/or Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS) programs. These programs provide school and classroom behavioral expectations for all students as well as more intensive evidence-based strategies for teachers to employ with more disruptive students. Additionally, all teachers could benefit with additional professional development that targets their roles in addressing bullying through classroom management and behavioral actions and supports. These programs would benefit from a behavioral progress monitoring component that can encompass bullying-related behavior in order to assess effectiveness, identify best practices, and provide information for data-driven decision making as well as collecting data for the type of intervention and longitudinal research that APA espouses in their recommendations.

Traditionally, the majority of programs focus on providing strategies directly to individual students (either victim or bully). More recently, programs have taken a school-wide approach that relies heavily on bully awareness focusing on the collective responsibility of all students, teachers, and administrators to act to counter these disruptive behaviors. Unfortunately, the research in these areas is limited and inconclusive (Merrell, et. al., 2008). Additionally these programs tend to focus on the more traditional conceptualization of bullies and victims, and as we discussed above, in order to address bullying in school we should expand the focus to include all students in order to proactively establish a social environment that does not reward socially astute bullies that use aggressive behavior to gain position within the social context of the school.

Established programs that address disruptive student behaviors represent a natural fit for interventions designed to address bullying in our schools. As indicated above, PBIS and/or Behavioral RTI models are evidence-based programs that have been found to successfully support schools in their efforts to decrease disruptive student behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2006; Hawken, Vincent & Schumann, 2008). Ross et al. (2008) provide a description of the key features of bullying prevention within school-wide positive behavioral intervention and support. These steps are implemented within a multi-tiered structure that typically characterizes the PBIS approach:

1. Employing evidence-based instructional methods to establish school-wide behavioral expectations for all students within a campus setting;

2. Monitoring and acknowledgement of students for engaging in behaviors that meet the established expectations;

3. Implementing proactive measures that prevent bullying behaviors from being rewarded by victims or bystanders and providing instructional support for students including more appropriate responses and replacement behaviors;

4. Correcting bullying-related behaviors through evidenced-based interventions;

5. Progress monitoring of student behavior to use in data-driven decision-making; and

6. Developing a team to organize, implement, and manage bullying prevention with the structure of a PBIS model.

These key features are used to instruct educators and students in the specific actions that are considered bullying behaviors; what steps to take when encountering bullying behaviors; how to instruct others in using appropriate actions to address bullying behaviors; and how to establish and sustain a proactive and preventive campus culture that reduces the impact of bullying behavior.

Anti-bullying programs can take a lesson from or be incorporated in these multi-tiered campus-wide positive behavioral support programs that have benefited from a systemic and comprehensive approach that involves all stakeholders in their implementation and are aligned with existing school district initiatives. It should encompass the best practices of previous programs in terms of addressing the most disruptive students through individualized interventions and providing universal bullying awareness and the establishment of positive behavioral expectations, but it should also incorporate implementation support materials and resources, additional teacher and staff professional development, and discipline management, progress monitoring, and behavior tracking to provide teachers and administrators with feedback and assist in determining best practices.

This approach, when implemented with fidelity and consistency, has been shown to improve effectiveness and sustainability.

How Review360 provides solutions for bullying

Review360® is a web-enabled program that assists in implementing effective evidence-based best practices to improve behavioral and academic outcomes for students. It serves to braid two important legislative requirements—Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Most states have adopted RTI and PBIS as Best Practices for intervening early to support students who struggle behaviorally and/or academically, developing tiered levels of support and intervention to address student needs, and monitoring student progress. Both RTI and PBIS requirements call for developing foundational Best Practices at the school and classroom level that are preventative in nature. Review360 assists in the development of a proactive framework at the school and classroom level, as well as providing intensive interventions and monitoring for students requiring more assistance. Review360 establishes and maintains best practices in supporting positive student behavior by educating teachers and other campus personnel in the fundamentals of school and classroom management, while aligning with current practices and supporting system-wide implementation by allowing for cooperation and sharing of innovative methods. Additionally, by providing real-time data to support communication of student behavior as well as progress monitoring, Review360 provides the information needed for the data-driven decision-making process and the feedback to maintain implementation consistency, establish best practices, and identify program areas or components that need changes and adjustments to improve the efficiency of the program. This constant monitoring and adjusting is a hallmark characteristic of what educational researchers are calling for in "knowledge products" (Morris and Hiebert, 2011).

Review360 takes a similar approach to addressing bullying as it does with other behavioral issues.

Specifically, it assists in the development of a proactive framework at the school and classroom level by changing the professional behavior of administrators, teachers, and other staff and improving the organizational structure. It then supports students by establishing the processes that identify problem behaviors, facilitates the documentation of bullying activities, identifies positive replacement behaviors, supplies research-based interventions and strategies, and enables real-time progress monitoring to determine the effectiveness of solutions. These processes are accomplished in alignment with existing district and campus resources and initiatives and applied (or implemented) system-wide to garner a high level of congruency of effort. The overall goal of the bullying prevention component of Review360 is to assist school districts and their campuses in the progression of creating a culture that prevents the development and incidents of bullying behavior. The basis of the Review360 bullying prevention component is founded in evidence-based research in the areas of school-wide behavioral support and intervention, classroom management principles, and strategies and interventions designed for individualized behavioral support.

School-wide behavioral support and intervention

Review360 aligns its efforts with current behavioral management practices of school districts and their campuses to facilitate the design and implementation of a discipline management system based on positive behavioral expectations and informed data-driven decision making.

The first step is accomplished by providing online professional development in concert with the establishment of a web-enabled discipline monitoring system and a universal behavioral screener. The second step is to supply a framework for the implementation of school-wide preventative and proactive activities to promote positive behavior.

Specifically, the Review360 Bullying prevention component provides the following:

- Overview of critical terminology, research proven factors, and the prevalence of bullying;

- Research-based characteristics of students who are bullies, targets, and witnesses and the effects of bullying on each;

- Public Policy and Anti-Bullying Legislation; guidelines for developing anti-bullying policies and procedures for reporting, investigating, responding, designing consequences and collecting critical information;

- Definition of cyber-bullying and its forms; tips for parents, administrators, teachers and students about avoiding cyber-bullying situations;

- Guidelines for creating and establishing school-wide expectations and proactive activities designed to improve campus climate by preventing bullying and replacing it with pro-social behaviors;

- Providing a web-based real-time discipline monitoring and reporting system; and

- Providing an online universal screener that can be used to help identify students that exhibit behaviors that are known predictors of engaging in bullying as well as the students who exhibit behaviors which put them at risk of victimization.

Classroom management

According to educational research, teacher education, training, and professional development activities are underwhelming in terms of how well they prepare teachers to establish the best practices for addressing student behavior in the classroom (Oliver and Reschly, 2007). This lack of preparation is even more prevalent when we evaluate teachers' knowledge and tactics regarding bullying prevention. Not only do teachers feel unprepared to address bullying and believe that they would benefit from more training, many cannot correctly define bullying and some express beliefs and attitudes that would

not be consistent with effective teacher behaviors toward students involved in bullying (Bauman & Del Rio, 2005).

Review360 provides teachers with online professional development and supports in six evidence-based core indices of an effective and well-managed classroom that they can use to establish or refine their behavioral management techniques:

1. Teaching behavioral expectations

2. Developing procedures and routines

3. Structuring the learning environment

4. Using reinforcement and acknowledgement

5. Improving student/teacher engagement

6. Developing effective correction procedures and strategies

Additionally, Review360 provides teachers with online professional training and support materials on Bullying prevention which are orientated to the classroom in alignment to the materials and activities directed at school-wide support. These resources include:

- Overview of definitions, terminology, and characteristics prevalent to bullying to help teachers develop a deeper level of understanding;

- Overview of district- and campus-specific bullying prevention behavioral expectations;

- Strategies and interventions that address individuals as well as the school climate and social status environments that foster bullying at the campus;

- Discussion scenarios, videos, and other resources which can be used to establish best practices within the classroom;

- Discipline reporting, classroom behavior spot check, classroom walk-through, student referral for more individualized behavioral support (to behavioral support team)

Through the utilization of web-enabled professional development, these components are provided to teachers to complete online and supports and resources are available for teachers to use to institute these best practices with their students within the classroom environment.

Strategies and interventions for individualized support

A subset of students at our schools don't readily respond to the universal behavioral supports that are implemented school-wide and within the classroom. These students require more individualized behavioral supports that are typically found at tiers 2 and 3 of PBIS and Behavioral RtI programs. Review360 assists teachers in addressing serious behavioral issues exhibited by individual students by facilitating the process of identifying these disruptive behaviors, helping teachers promote positive replacement behaviors, and supplying function-driven evidence-based interventions and strategies through a delivery method that provides web-based instructional support and professional development in order to implement and sustain best practices. The function-driven evidence-based strategies and interventions employed by Review360 as positive behavioral supports were developed from psychological and educational research literature as well as from best practices gathered from the pragmatic experiences of professionals.

The systems and procedures used to address serious behavioral issues in Review360 are well placed to be used to support bullies, bully/victims, and victims that require individualized behavioral interventions.

- Functional Behavioral Assessments to help identify those students that require more intensive interventions for their chronic bullying-related behaviors;

- Web-based behavioral plan design process that helps teachers identify specific disruptive bullying or victim behaviors and their pro-social replacement behaviors as well as suggestions for evidence-based strategies and interventions to put into individualized plans;

- Web-based real-time behavioral progress monitoring system that can track the improvement of individual students; and

- Reports and charts at the district, campus, classroom, and student level that allow for the communication of progress and implementation monitoring.

Review360 supports the continual evaluation of evidence-based individualized interventions and strategies in order to maintain their appropriateness and effectiveness. Using this process to establish itself as a "Knowledge Product" (Morris & Hiebert, 2011), the system employs feedback to upgrade and sustain its implementation and alignment to educational best practices that are the most effective methods of improving student behavior.

A four-step process is used to ensure that the most effective and relevant evidence-based interventions and strategies are available for teachers to use with their students:

1. Best practices in the area of behavioral support are collected and developed into straightforward interventions which teachers can implement with their students;

2. These best practices are organized in alignment with common areas of student behavioral issues (aggression, social/interpersonal, academic difficulties, defiance, hyperactivity/impulsivity, and inattention/disorganization);

3. Review360 allows for the continual evaluation of teachers' perceptions and acceptability of each specific behavioral intervention and strategy used by the system; and

4. Through real-time online progress monitoring, Review360 collects student behavioral performance data which is used to assess the effectiveness of each evidence-based strategy and intervention.

Reference list

American Psychological Association (2010). *Applications of Psychological Science to Teaching and Learning: Gaps in the Literature.* APA.

Archer, J., & Coyne, S. (2005). An integrated review of indirect, relational, and social aggression. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 9*, 212-230.

Bauman, S. & Del Rio, A. (2005). Knowledge and beliefs about bullying in schools. *School Psychology International, 26*, 428-442

Cook, C.R. , Williams, K.R., Guerra, N.G., Kim, T. E., & Sadek, S. (2010). Preditors of bullying and victimization in childhood and adolescence: A meta-analytic investigation. *School Psychology Quarterly, 25*, 65-83.

Faris, R. and Felmlee, D. (2011) Status Struggles: Network Centrality and Gender Segregation in Same- and Cross-Gender Aggression. *American Sociological Review, 76(1)*, 48-73.

Farmer, T. W., Petrin, R. A., Robertson, D. L., Fraser, M. W., Hall, C. M., Day, S. H., & Dadisman, K. (2010). Peer relations of bullies, bully-victims, and victims: The two social worlds of bullying in second-grade classrooms. *Elementary School Journal, 110*, 364–392.

Hawken, L. S., Vincent, C.G., & Schumann, J. (2008). Response to Intervention for social behavior. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 16(4)*, 213-225.

Kochenderfer-Ladd, B., & Waldrop, J. (2001). Chronicity and instability of children's peer victimization experiences as predictors of loneliness and social satisfaction trajectories. *Child Development, 72*, 134-151.

Merrell, K. W., Gueldner, B. A., Ross, S. W., & Isava, D. M. (2008). How effective are school bullying intervention programs? A meta-analysis of intervention research. *School Psychology Quarterly, 23(1)*, 26-42.

Morris, A.K., & Hiebert, J. (2011). Creating Shared Instructional Products: An Alternative to Improving Teaching. *Educational Researcher, 40 (1)*, 5-14.

Nansel, T.R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R.S., Ruan, J., Simons-Morton, B., Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying behaviors among U.S. youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 285*, 2094-2100.

National Education Association. (1995). "Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Results." (http://www.nea.org).

Oliver, R. M. & Reschly, D. J. (2007). Effective Classroom Management: Teacher Preparation and Professional Development. *National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.* (http://www.tqsource.org/connection/spEdBehavior.php)

Ross, S., Horner, R., & Stiller, B. (2008). *Bully prevention in positive behavior support.* Eugene OR: Educational and Community Supports. (http://www.pbis.org/pbis_resource_detail_page.aspx?Type=4&PBIS_ResourceID=712)

Soleberg, M. & Olweus, D. (2003). Prevalence Estimation of School Bullying With the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire. *Aggressive Behavior, 29*, 239-268.

Sugai, G. & Horner, R. (2006) A Promising Approach for Expanding and Sustaining School-Wide Positive Behavior Support. *School Psychology Review, 35 (2)*, 245-259.

Pearson